

# Are we ready to coach the millennials?

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In 2014, the number of millennials in the workplace overtook the baby boomers, and just a year later they surpassed Generation X workers too. By 2020, the global workforce will be significantly dominated by millennials. Growing up with tech as a given; innately connected and globally hardwired there's no doubt that the differences between millennials and previous generations are significant. Therefore, organisations can expect unprecedented cultural change as millennials become a greater force in the workplace.



Social historians have noted that millennials are not just shaped differently by the advanced technologies of their time. For the most part, there have also been notable differences in the ways they have been raised. Anxious not to repeat their parents' mistakes, the parents of the millennial generation are generally regarded as more conscious, more concerned and more doting. Millennials were children who have been both seen and heard.

While millennials may be criticised by some for their sense of entitlement, demands for recognition and hurry to advance themselves, they are equally praised by others for their positive self-worth and outlook, their ambition and wish to make a difference, as well as their team spirit, ease with diversity and readiness to adapt.

They bring to the workplace a fresh set of values, perspectives and outlooks that include:

- expecting open communications and collaborative relationships with accessible managers who provide them with regular, constructive feedback.
- responding positively to encouragement, and having little tolerance for hostility in the workplace.
- expecting to participate in decisions of how they are to be managed, coached and mentored so that they get customised support.
- wanting clear road maps and goals so that they know and like what is up ahead for them.
- needing clear and implicit instructions and guidance when it comes to social boundaries in the workplace.
- preferring frequent, quick, clear interactions and engagements.

What is interesting for coaches, is that studies such as [this one](#) reported on in the *Harvard Business Review*, shows that they're a generation with not just an openness to being coached in the workplace, but a strong desire for it.

So, are we ready to coach millennials? We asked George Phipps, executive coach and SACAP educator, for his views:

### **1. Do you think that coaches will need to adapt their styles, signatures and interventions to best meet the needs of millennials?**

"I believe it is incumbent on coaches to understand the way millennials relate to their world and be able to remove any preconceived biases or assumptions they may have before they work together with them. Working with a millennial will also require the coach to build good rapport and trust upfront. It would be important to ask them how they would like to be coached and to set your intentions and boundaries as a coach upfront.

### **2. Do you think that coaching millennials will be more or less challenging for coaches?**

"This may depend on the age of the coach and their knowledge of how millennials' minds work. Many coaches today have teenage or adult children, and have preconceived thoughts about this age group. Coaches need to be aware of who they are coaching. It may be extra challenging for them to not want to offer advice or to hold the space for the millennial client. The 'dancing in the moment' may be very different to what they are used to."

### **3. What are your top five suggestions for those coaching millennials?**

- "Figure out what really drives them, and understand their values and their map of the world.
- "Use really powerful questions to get the 'why' and the 'bigger picture'.
- "Ensure you and your millennial client have solid mechanisms in place to address accountability.
- "Be sure to set them up for success in regards to SMART goals.
- "Celebrate their successes because they need feedback, encouragement and consistency."

### **4. Are there any generational 'pitfalls' that coaches should be particularly aware of?**

"Millennials can take on too much too fast. They want to get to the top without necessarily taking all the right steps. I think we need to create awareness around exactly what is involved in getting to where they want to be and the drawbacks of moving too fast. Millennials also tend to have a short attention span, so it is important for coaches to understand this and work with it."

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